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PROMOTED FROM THE RANKS

A WAR BALLAD



By MATTHEW CRAIG



PROMOTED
FROM THE RANKS

OR

THE ODYSSEY OF A BRASS POT

A WAR BALLAD

By MATTHEW CRAIG



AUTHORS CO-OPERATIVE PUB. CO.
125 Church St., New York City

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1916

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By

MATTHEW CRAIG

**Germany's Metal Pots, Pans,
Kettles, Needed for Army.**

Berlin, via London, July 31 (A.P.)—The military authorities of the province of Brandenburg have issued an order expropriating all supplies of copper, brass and nickel. The order covers skillets, pots, pans and kettles in households. These articles may be requisitioned until further notice, but must not be sold, destroyed or disposed of in any way.

#032

JAN 15 1916

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no. 1

PROMOTED FROM THE RANKS

I

He was made of sheet copper, of rubicund
glow,

And he hung on the wall of a great château
Many more than a hundred years ago.

He was part of the revel and high romance,
The vintage cheer with its measured dance,
In that stately, far-away time of France.

The huntsmen's *hallali* reached where he
hung,

And pastourelle pipes; while harps were
strung

And roundel and gay ballade were sung;
And odors of capon with truffes sauté,
Of old Bourgogne and of Epernay

Mixed with the strains of the roundelay.
Till *he* sang, with a copperine ring, where
 he stood
On his iron tripod o'er the crackling wood;
It was "*Uive la joiel*"—French for "long
 live good food."
Bref, he asked nothing more than here to
 stay—
Our casserole friend—till the final day
When coppers and cooks shall be laid away.

II

Then one bright morn in the month of
May—

Or of Floréal then it were best to say—
When apple-blooms, like tapestry, lay
On the yellow loam of the old *verger*
And a seal of peace closed the nestled farms,
There rose sudden panic with shrill alarms
From the belfry-tower, wild clatter of arms
And mounting of horse; for a far cry flew
Up the dust hidden road: "They come, the
Bleus!"

Our friend, from his kettle-rack on the wall,
Caught everything and reflected it all;
How the great bronze gates of the park
flung wide,
How the citizen-soldiers trooped inside
And, without a blow, the demesne occupied;
Keys of cellar and wine-vault were yielded
up

And *Egalite* pledged in fraternal cup
When soldiers and peasants sat down to
sup.
For myrmidons, valets and chef, be it said,
Had stayed behind when the seigneurie fled.
Nota: the chef slept that night in the old
Count's bed.

III

So it was that our hero happened to go
To the wars, in the train of the great
Marceau,
Beyond the Rhine and into the Countries
Low.
Those were stirring times; and they stirred
him, too,
Whether 'twas *sauer-kraut* or *braten* or French
ragout—
Which is nothing more complex than Irish
stew.
And always, 'mid cannon and carnage, he
bore
A brave front, a face just as bright as be-
fore,
And show me what hero or war-lord does
more.
When, at last, came peace. His old chef had
died;
His comrades, the kettles, were scattered
wide;

He was brought home, a gift, to a sweet
Flemish bride;
Who so furbished and scoured him, with
true Flemish might
And a vigor which made him blush red with
delight,
That you'd take him for gold in the small
candle-light.
Then again to the rack on a kitchen wall,
where
Hung round-bellied pewter and black earth-
enware;
He blinked at these last, an aristocrat's
stare—
There *are* castes in copper as you are aware.
But *n'importe*. It was peace and the good
man's cheer,
Good, homely ways and good home-brewed
beer,
Afar from war's passion and frenzy and
fear.
The sun sifted green through the vines at
the door
Putting patches of light on the white
sanded floor,

With abundance, content, the birth-right of
the poor.

Till, in time, like ripe pippins, children's
faces,

Capped in the quaintest of Flemish laces,
Smiled back from his burnished copper
spaces. . . .

And if, in his exile, his heart oft would burn
For his fair native land, it was like when
we yearn

For our love song of youth which may
never return.



IV

Then dawned a black day, tho' God's sun
blessed His earth,

But it rose on bowed heads, empty fields,
stilled mirth

And on ashes strewn cold in each humble
hearth.

Loud wrack split the sun-light with horror,
despair,

And death came hurtling through the air
Picking its toll of the young and fair.

Our veteran knew it, that distant breath
From the battle's throat which brought
them death.

Through the unsheltered cottage the shot
flew wild.

He caught what he could and turned it aside
From the breast of the mother who suckled
her child,

From the palsied grandam he had known as
a bride.

He fought—giving back with each resounding stroke,

And held till a shell carried all. Blind with smoke,

He crashed 'neath their home with the dead peasant folk

To oblivion stunned. . . .

V

It was bright when he woke.
Incautious, he stretched—and he almost
broke.

He looked. How came he to be in such
plight?

His corpulent girth was diminished, quite,
And buttoned up snug in a uniform tight,
In cut like an oblong sort of bell . . .

He was capped and tipped to a shrapnel
shell.

Great Bellona! . . . He asked himself
how it befell

That he, who had boiled with such ardent
breath

That all men should live, must now deal
them death.

“Are not you of the Fatherland?” some-
body said

Close beside him, or under; perchance over-
head?

'T was between him, the part of himself
that was lead.

He shuddered: "*Canaille*"; but politely
said he,

For first he was French what e'er else he
might be,

"Of the Fatherland? Yes; but we call it
Patrie."

There was time for no more. From his
place in the trench,

He descried, far beyond, the blue lines of
the French,

And his Gallic heart leaped to the fight at
the thought

Of those deep, sodden trenches where brave
comrades fought.

He would reach them, somehow, from this
enemy lot.

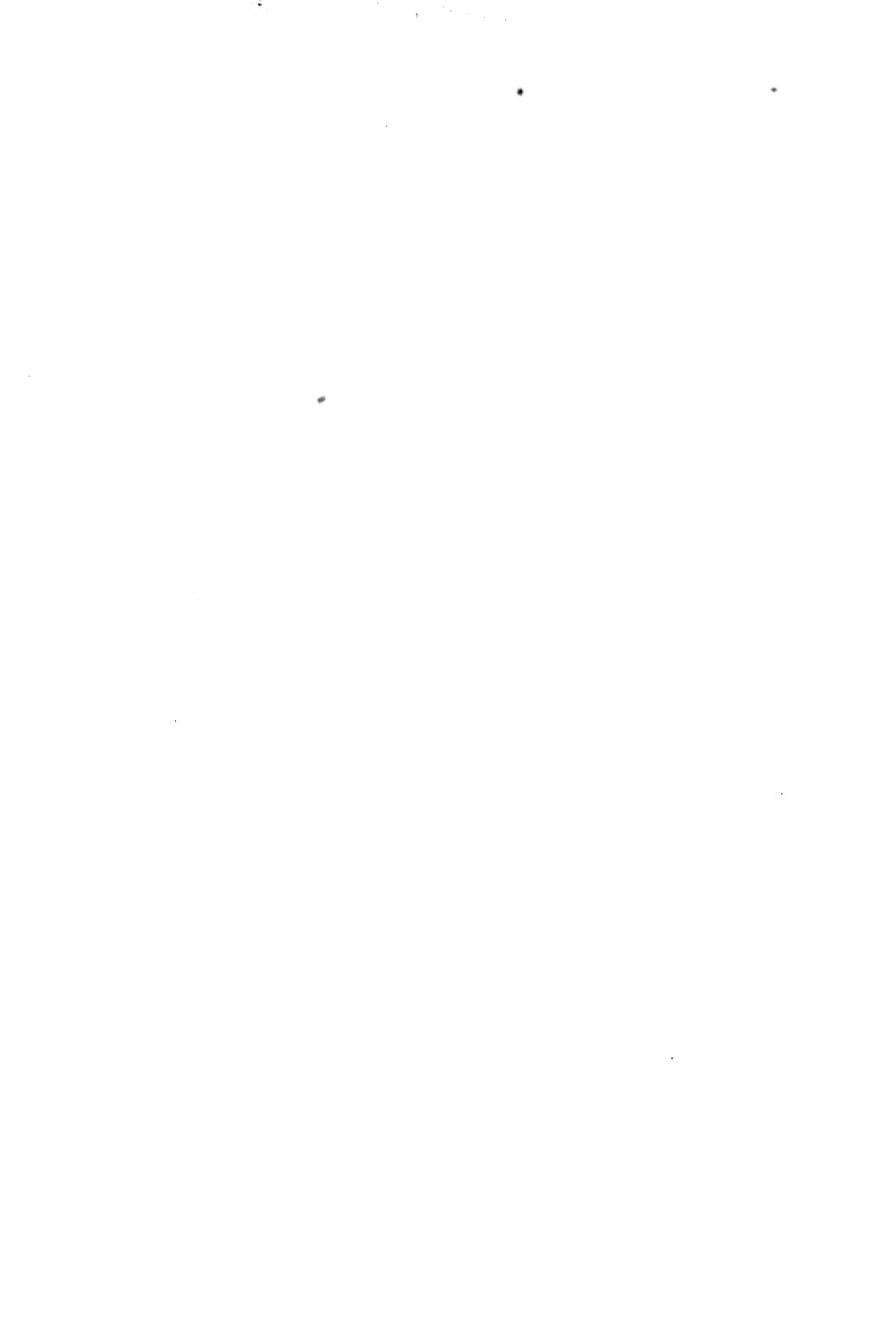
He waited. His turn soon to speak, 'mid the
shriek

And shrill and yell of shrapnel and shell

And stench of fumes in this hideous hell.

At last. His turn now. With a thrill un-
known—

The exile's joy to meet his own—
He sped; and his shout died in a groan.
Too late he knew his murderous quest,
Too late, as he tore on the battle's crest,
And buried him deep in a Frenchman's
 breast.



VI

And is that the end of the tale? Not so,
There's a sequel. It happened a week ago.

Again do the great park gates swing wide
While car and ambulance speed inside,
In the old Count's chamber line cots, side by
side.

On turret and terrace the sun slants low
Flaming the mullions to crimson bars,
Laying the peace of its afterglow
On the blood-drenched fields, with their harvest
of wars.

It circles a halo, like love's mystic spell,
About two who stand in the great oriel.
A pale young soldier, a white-capped girl
Snatch their moment of love from the battle
swirl.

Short is the time. Theirs is love denied—
War-love—by suffering sanctified,

With Death standing ever close beside.
Now they say good-bye ere he leave for
the strife.
Close he enfolds her, his day-old wife,
The girl who has nursed him back to life.
And brave is their parting, albeit for years,
High words and hopeful, unbroken by fears,
While, courageous as tender, they smile
through their tears.
Yet little reck they of their young love's
loss.
On each brave breast is blazoned the
Cross,
A red-crossed band on her uniform white,
On his tunic the cross he has won in the
fight—
Like blood drops its jewels hang red in the
light—
“Keep it, sweetheart; and this—soldier
gifts to my bride,”
And her smile loosed the tear it had striven
to hide
As she took it, the splinter they'd found in
his side.

'Twas a fractional bit of the once brilliant
whole—

This veteran rest of our French casserole—

But he'd lost not one whit of his Gallican
soul;

For he blushed, now, the uttermost scarlet
of bliss

'Neath that warm tear's touch and her pas-
sionate kiss.

Fight and fall by the side of his old Seig-
neur's heir!

Feel the tear and the lips of his liege ladye
fair!

Ah, 'twas "Gloria Victis" aplenty—to spare!

Yet more. For again he is destined to go,

But promoted, how far, from the old ranks
below,

In line to the wall of the proud Château

By the Cross of the Legion, himself a hero.



VII

She paled as she turned to their farewell
embrace

While the sun to a temple transfigured the
place.

Long and silent he looked in her brave, up-
turned face

Then above, to the grim likenessed line of
his race,

And a moment they bowed their young
heads, rev'rently.

Then his voice like a bugle-call rang, blithe
and free:

(While a cracked copper ring seemed to
chime in with glee)

"Long live our dear France, God, Wife and
Patrie!"

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